

Pre-Crisis Prevention

Effective Programs and Policies to Reduce Firearm Violence in Texas Schools

Executive Summary:

The persistent threat of firearm violence in Texas schools has prompted a series of policy responses, most notably in the aftermath of the 2022 Uvalde tragedy. In response, Texas passed **SB 11 (2023)**, requiring every public school district to maintain an **armed presence**, whether through resource officers or school police. This measure reflects a **reactive strategy** that intervenes only after a threat has materialized, rather than addressing the underlying factors that contribute to violence. In contrast, **pre-crisis prevention** efforts seek to identify and mitigate risks before they escalate. Three such approaches are evaluated: **Anonymous Reporting Systems, Behavioral Threat Assessment and Mental Health Programs**, and **policies that restrict access to firearms**. Each strategy presents unique strengths and limitations, as well as practical implementation challenges. An examination of these alternatives informs Texas policymakers, educators, and communities about **evidence-based options** that move beyond reactive security measures toward more comprehensive prevention.

Background:

Firearm violence in Texas schools has prompted significant legislative action, most notably following the 2022 Uvalde massacre, **the deadliest school shooting in state history**. Between 2019 and 2022, U.S. schools recorded over 100 shooting incidents, with Texas among the highest-affected states.¹ Firearms have since surpassed motor vehicle accidents as the **leading cause of death** for children and teenagers nationally. Texas passed **SB 11 in 2023**, requiring every public school district to maintain an **armed presence** through School Resource Officers or trained school marshals; the law further mandates active shooter training and campus safety audits for all districts.⁸ Despite this prioritization of on-campus security, **RAND Research** finds **no empirical evidence** that armed staff policies reduce mass shootings, unintentional injuries, or violent crime in K-12 schools, *underscoring the absence of demonstrated effectiveness*.⁶

Overview of Alternatives:

Alternative 1: See Something, Say Something

- 24/7 anonymous tip line in 350+ school districts.⁷
- Educates students and staff to recognize and report concerning behaviors, such as threats, social withdrawal, or expressions of hopelessness, before they escalate.
- 328,000+ tips filed; 18 credible threats intercepted in 2025.

Alternative 2: Behavioral Threat Assessment & Mental Health Programs

- School teams assess at-risk students before a crisis develops.⁵
- Crisis intervention training for teachers: trauma-informed practices.
- Proven effective in rural, under-resourced communities with few counselors, as BTA trains teachers & administrators to fill the gap.

Alternative 3: Restricting Access to Firearms

- Raise the minimum firearm purchase age to 21 for civilians.³
- Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs), commonly called Red Flag Laws, are currently active in 19 states.²
- Comprehensive background checks reduce prohibited purchaser access.³

Sources:

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. (2024). School shootings in the U.S.: 2019–2022. *Pediatrics*. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-064311>
2. Everytown Research & Policy. (n.d.). *How can we prevent gun violence in schools?* <https://everytownresearch.org/report/how-can-we-prevent-gun-violence-in-schools/>
3. Giffords Law Center. (n.d.). *Gun violence in schools*. <https://giffords.org/issues/kids-and-guns/gun-violence-in-schools/>
4. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. (2024). *Guns remain leading cause of death for children and teens*. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2024/guns-remain-leading-cause-of-death-for-children-and-teens>

Alternative 1: See Something, Say Something

The **Say Something Anonymous Reporting System**, developed by Sandy Hook Promise, offers students and staff **a confidential channel** to report weapons, threats, or behavioral warning signs *before they escalate*. Implemented in more than **350 school districts**, the initiative has trained over **31 million individuals** to identify and respond to early indicators of potential harm.⁷ As of 2025, the system has received over **328,000 tips** nationally and intervened in **18 credible threats**.⁷ By formalizing **peer observation** as a core component of school safety, Say Something integrates early detection into a broader framework of violence prevention. The program's effectiveness, however, **depends heavily on school culture and community trust**, factors that *vary considerably across Texas*. Urban districts with established counseling infrastructure may more readily normalize peer reporting, whereas rural communities with tighter social networks may face greater resistance.

Positives -

- Addresses root behavioral causes through early identification.
- Improves overall school climate and mental wellness.
- Adaptable to rural and under-resourced environments.

Negatives -

- Requires trained staff and sustained funding commitments.
- Risk of over-identification or student stigmatization.
- Implementation quality varies widely across districts.

Positives -

- Empowers peers to act on early warning signs.
- Scalable and low-cost across district sizes.
- 24/7 anonymous access; reduces fear of retaliation.

Negatives -

- Risk of false/malicious reports that overwhelm staff.
- Effectiveness depends on school culture and trust.
- Does not address the underlying causes of violence.

Alternative 2: Mental Health Policy

Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) programs train school teams to identify students exhibiting **warning behaviors** and intervene **before threats escalate**.⁵ Research shows BTA meaningfully improves **school climate and safety**, including in rural communities where mental health resources are scarce and a single counselor may serve hundreds of students.⁵ In those settings, **BTA equips teachers and administrators** to identify warning signs, extending capacity beyond dedicated specialists.⁵ Complementary programs, including **crisis intervention training** for educators, emphasize **trauma-informed de-escalation** practices to intercept potential violence early. Together, these approaches shift school safety from **reactive response** to **preventive intervention**.

Alternative 3: Restricting Access to Firearms

A range of policy interventions can be implemented to **limit youth access to firearms prior to the onset of violence**. Increasing the **minimum legal age for firearm purchases to 21** is intended to postpone access until individuals reach a stage of **greater neurological maturity**, thus reducing the likelihood of **impulsive acquisition**.³ **Extreme Risk Protection Orders**, also known as **Red Flag Laws**, provide a legal option for family members, educators, or law enforcement to request the **temporary removal of firearms** from individuals deemed to be at risk; these laws are currently in effect in **19 states**.² **Comprehensive background checks**, especially when combined with **purchase licensing requirements**, serve as a safeguard to **prevent prohibited individuals from obtaining firearms**.³

Positives -

- ERPOs provide targeted, court-supervised intervention.
- Background checks are broadly supported across party lines.
- Age restrictions target the highest-risk developmental period.

Negatives -

- Age restrictions may face Second Amendment legal challenges.
- ERPO enforcement and due process standards vary by state.
- Background check gaps persist in the unregulated purchasing of firearms.

Sources:

5. Lee, T. H., et al. (2025). Behavioral threat assessment can promote school climate and improve school safety. *Journal of School Health*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/josh.70094>
6. RAND Corporation. (n.d.). *Laws allowing armed staff in K-12 schools*. <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/laws-allowing-armed-staff-in-K12-schools.html>
7. Sandy Hook Promise. (n.d.). *Say something anonymous reporting system*. <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/what-we-do/programs/violence-prevention/say-something-anonymous-reporting-system/>
8. Texas Legislature. (n.d.). *Texas Education Code § 37.0815*. <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/?tab=1&code=ED&chapter=ED.37&artSec=37.0815>

Further Readings:

1. NPR. (2024, January 17). Anonymous tip lines help schools prevent gun violence. *NPR Health Shots*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2024/01/17/1225093182/anonymous-tip-lines-school-gun-violence-pediatrics>
2. Pew Research Center. (2024, July 24). *Key facts about Americans and guns*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/07/24/key-facts-about-americans-and-guns/>
3. Sandy Hook Promise. (n.d.). *Start with hello*. <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/what-we-do/programs/school-climate-safety/start-with-hello/>
4. SAMHSA. (n.d.). *988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline FAQs*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/988/faqs>
5. Klarevas, L., et al. (2026). Analysis of state firearm laws and K-12 school shootings in the United States. *Social Science and Medicine*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953626001243>
6. Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2021). *Background checks for firearms transfers, 2021*. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/bcft21.pdf>